

V.18 N.4 (#96) Summer 2009 \$12.00

OUR SCHOOLS

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives

OUR SELVES

Building inclusive
classrooms, communities

Financial literacy
education — the solution
to credit crises?

The corporate presence in
Japanese classrooms



Freedom to Teach, Freedom to Learn

Professional judgment, authentic
learning and creative classrooms

Van Fraen

Contents

VOLUME 18, NUMBER 4 (#96)

SUMMER 2009



7 Education Roundup

LARRY KUEHN

11 Editorial

Freedom to Teach, Freedom to Learn

ERIKA SHAKER

17 Viewpoints:

17 “Why don’t you just give them a worksheet?”

Learning how (not) to teach

LACEY LANIGAN

21 Inspiring Creativity: The Collision of Diversity and Empowerment

JONATHAN SCOTT

25 The Student’s Freedom to Learn Requires the Educator’s Freedom to Teach

NICK FORTE

35 Professional (and Personal) Development

For educators, teaching and learning are inseparable

JOHN ROMAS

43 Creative and Contagious: A Critical Review of the Raging Grannies

CORI SCHMITZ

55 School Censorship and the Null Curriculum

STEPHEN TEDESCO

63 Out of Order: The Misuse of Legal Drama in Canadian Secondary School Law Classrooms

VITO TOTINO

75 “Partners” in Education?

Why school parent councils should not be fundraising and what they should be doing instead

CARLO RICCI

83 Building Inclusive Classrooms and Communities

How teachers and parents can work together to support families created through transracial adoption and other non-traditional families

SONJA DWYER and LYNN GIDLICK

97 Challenging Views Toward Inclusive Education of Disabled Students

PAUL HORN

107 “Not Mining is Not An Option!”

Corporate lessons from the *Mining Matters* curriculum

STUART TANNOCK

**115 Efficiency, Democratic Inclusion and
Education: From Scientific Management to
the Matrix**

MIKE CORBETT

**123 Is Financial Literacy Education the Solution to
Credit Crises?**

LAURA ELIZABETH PINTO

135 9/11: A New Light

REG SURETTE

**145 University Front:
Free Water: A Thing of the Past?**

PAUL KOZAK

151 From Other Media:

**151 Why Merit Pay for Teachers Just Doesn't
Work**

DOUG LITTLE

155 Coming Out in Elementary School

DAVID BUTLER

**159 International
The Corporate Presence in Japanese
Classrooms**

YOSHIMI UESUGI

**173 From the Pram to Parliament Hill
About Canada: Childcare by Martha Friendly
& Susan Prentice**

A REVIEW BY LAUREL ROTHMAN



Freedom to Teach, Freedom to Learn

BY ERIKA SHAKER

After several theme-focused issues of *Our Schools/Our Selves*, we felt it was time for one that contained a mix of articles looking at a variety of topics, in preparation for an audience looking forward to some summer reading. But as the content came in, and as the articles began to settle into their places, a theme appeared after all: the relationship between allowing teachers more professional autonomy and being more respectful of their knowledge and expertise, and the creation of an educational environment more conducive to a variety of learning styles and a broad range of student needs.

It's that relationship between educators and students at all levels — based on trust, understanding and respect — that

allows for a rich, mutually-beneficial teaching and learning experience. And so, while many authors in his issue of *Our Schools/Our Selves* talk about how they developed fulfilling relationships with students in their classes — relationships that they themselves learned from — a number of articles also deal with the frustrations and obstacles so many teachers face. A lack of trust in their knowledge and experience. A reluctance on the part of administrators to allow teachers to experiment with the curriculum and with different teaching and learning styles. An over-emphasis on standardized assessment — both assessment of teaching “quality” and student “learning”. Other articles focus on the experiences of new teach-

ers who, in learning about their profession, are working to develop relationships with students that facilitate quality learning experiences, and trying to make classrooms more flexible, engaging, and responsive to the diverse needs and learning styles of students.

“Freedom to Teach, Freedom to Learn” explores that fundamental relationship between teaching and learning — one that creates the conditions for and nurtures high-quality, authentic educational experiences from which students, educators and the entire education system benefit. I’m particularly excited that so many of the articles in this issue are written by educators — and of those, many are about to start or have just started their careers. They talk about disappointments and frustrations, but also about soaring optimism and excitement, personal and professional fulfillment, and above all a passion for their jobs, their commitment to make classrooms more accommodating of different teaching and learning styles, and a genuine appreciation of the privilege of working with students.

Nick Forte, a teacher with over 20 years of experience, talks about his frustrations with an education system that he feels is increasingly dismissive of the professional judgment of educators and their ability to determine whether or not authentic learning has taken place. “An experienced classroom teacher,” he writes, “knows when quality learning is taking place —

and has no problem being responsible for ensuring that students are learning, provided that this assessment is determined by theory, research and practice....The teacher sees not only the work produced in a field of study by the students, but also witnesses the way students critically think, the style of questions asked, the willingness to take risks and whether or not they use their good sense. Professional judgment serves the teacher in planning for evaluation, choosing evaluation methods, and making real decisions about student learning.” In a similar vein, Doug Little outlines some of the reasons why merit pay for teachers — a “new” initiative gaining momentum due in part to Obama’s recent encouragement of aspects of this practice — does not cultivate or ensure professionalism or prove that high-quality teaching has taken place.

Lacey Lanigan describes two very different experiences she had during her placements as a young teacher, and talks about the important role of associate teachers in helping to foster supportive, respectful, creative and flexible classroom experiences for those entering the profession. John Romas, a new teacher (new to Ontario’s education system, anyway) has provided a very personal recollection of his first two years in a classroom, sharing his frustrations, his excitement, and — above all — his realization that teaching and learning will always be intertwined.

Jonathon Scott, the former program director of the Ontario Student Trustees' Association, talks about the need for students to be involved in the education process and in their classrooms in order to ensure that we create and nurture a truly creative society. "The creative classroom," he writes, "...is one which treasures diversity as an incubator and impetus for ideas. But the way the classroom system operates remains vital. We need to involve and nurture creativity and the surest way to achieve this is through student empowerment in the process." His suggestion that we need to allow kids to "make mistakes" and "get messy" is a challenge to many of the pro-standardization arguments that Nick Forte and others critique, reinforcing the link between flexibility in teaching and the creation of authentic, fulfilling learning experiences. Carlo Ricci's article on school parent councils suggests that, far from being on-call fundraisers, parents should be working for, among other things, more inclusion and flexibility in education and in teaching and learning styles.

Inclusive and diverse classrooms is theme that several of our authors explore. Sonja Dwyer and Lynn Gidluck talk about how parents and teachers can, in collaboration, work to broaden accepted definitions of "family" in order to recognize the realities of non-traditional families including those created through transracial adoption.

This has broad implications, as the authors write: "...as schools support the improvement of interracial interaction, they are supporting the preparation of multicultural citizens who are able to participate in an interdependent world."

In a thoughtful and nuanced piece, Reg Surett also tackles the issue of multiculturalism and the role of the school in facilitating inter-cultural understanding, particularly since September 11, 2001. He explains: "There is no disputing the fact that forms of oppression against Muslims in North America further accentuates negative stereotyping post-9/11, and I am not arguing that the increase in multicultural awareness across North America outweighs or would outweigh these negative outcomes. But I also believe it is important to present positive and hopeful accounts of some relevant data that support the idea that North American education systems are benefitting or have benefitted from Islamic multicultural awareness post-9/11."

Paul Horn examines the concept of inclusive classrooms in a thoughtful article that challenges the current views toward inclusive education for students with disabilities. "When adequately supported in schools," he writes, "disabled students leave with a wider range of social and recreational options, leading to an enhanced quality of life. We need to see schooling as more than preparation for work, and realize that inclusive schooling

has many ancillary benefits for children of all abilities.”

Inclusive education — and how it butts up against the prevailing rhetoric of “efficiency” — is one of the many topics Mike Corbett discusses in his article. “Efficiency” should not be the way in which we determine the validity of an educational program or priority, he explains. “The recent special needs programming review in Nova Scotia was framed in terms of ‘efficiency.’ To me this is problematic. We do not provide special needs service because it is ‘efficient’ (although in the long run this may actually be the case)...We have special needs programming and schools in isolated communities and a variety of other educational initiatives because they are inclusive and just practices and because we believe it is a democratic right for all citizens to have equal access to quality services.

And David Butler talks about his experience coming out as a gay teacher to 200 students at his elementary school on Pink T-shirt Day, and how he used this as an educational opportunity to address issues of homophobia and heteronormativity with students and other staff members.

Several of our authors also examined content and resources being used inside the classroom. Vito Totino has written a piece looking at the use — or misuse — of TV legal drama in high school law classrooms and discussing the impact of Hollywood-based portrayals of the legal profession and

the American justice system on young aspiring lawyers in Canadian high schools. “What I’m trying to do,” he explains, “is address the phenomenon of adolescents wanting to be lawyers at least in part as a result of an entertainment-based and manufactured misconception that can go unchallenged by a lack of critical classroom-based analysis.” Stephen Tedesco explores the “null curriculum” in schools which is, he argues, a result of active censorship that has only been exacerbated by fear of or discomfort with the internet and internet-based technologies. The implications of active school censorship, he argues, must be carefully considered, because, if we allow censorship to go unchallenged “students may not realize that there are ideas and socially-accepted norms that need to be challenged and questions which need to be asked.”

Stuart Tannock, an education researcher, describes his experience in a workshop for pre-service teachers facilitated by the Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada (a lobby group for the mining industry) *Mining Matters* program. “Paying close attention to programs such as *Mining Matters* will always be important, for it is here that problems of corporatization tend to be most easily seen,” he explains. “But critical response needs to move swiftly to a broader level of reasserting the need for a clear distinction and separation of private and corporate from public

interests, and insisting on the value and importance of embracing public over corporate leadership in the setting of our collective educational, social, political, economic and environmental agendas.” Similarly, Yoshimi Uesugi, an associate professor at a university in Japan, provides an analysis of commercialism in Japanese schools — an area that has, she argues, largely gone unexamined in spite of its tremendous importance, its pervasiveness, and its implications for democracy. Laura Pinto provides a thoughtful critique of the perception that the current economic crisis could have been averted if only the public had become educated as to basic personal finances. It’s far more nuanced, she argues. “Poor financial choices — certainly not the cause of financial crises, but a legitimate problem nonetheless — cannot be reduced to lack of knowledge or uninformed choice. They are far more complicated, and are related to larger societal issues.” And in a somewhat playful article, Paul Kozak documents his attempts to locate water fountains on his university campus, and uses this exercise as a basis to talk about the erosion of public infrastructure in the face of creeping corporatization.

And finally, because we know that education goes beyond classrooms and is just as much about making the world better for future generations, we are pleased to include an article by Cori Schmitz

about the educative and societal impact of the Raging Grannies. She explains: “I discovered...that at least part of my own interest in the Raging Grannies comes from the realization that I will, if I am lucky, become one someday — an enraged grandmother.... Personal actions and reactions need to be taken continually out into the public forum to generate debate, inspire collaboration, foster understanding, and possibly, to speak on behalf of those who may not have the opportunity or resources to do so.”

When I spoke with Dirk Van Stralen about a cover illustration and explained some of the themes the articles in this issue addressed — teacher autonomy, standardization, merit pay, inflexibility, and the relationship between teaching conditions and learning outcomes — he gave it some thought and came up with the glorious image you see today. He chose to focus on the results of giving teachers more freedom to use their professional judgment, their expertise, and their creativity — and I’m so grateful. We need to always remember the ways in which what happens inside and outside the classroom impacts students: how they learn; how they grow; how they care for themselves, each other and the world around them. And how they (and we — for as our writers point out, the connections between teaching and learning are profound) ultimately find and learn to use their wings.

